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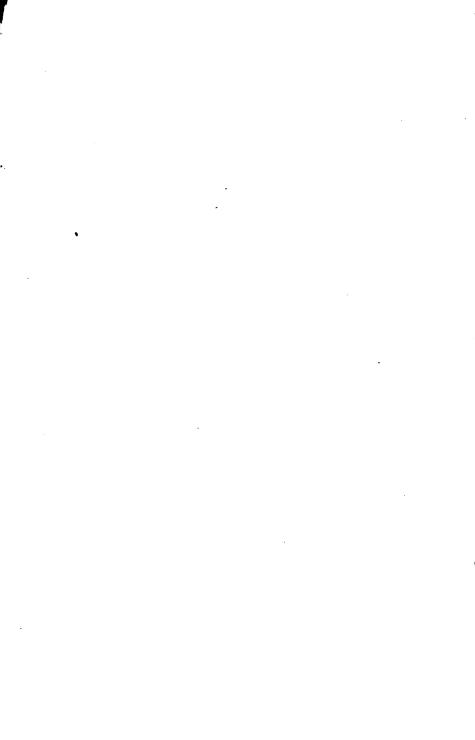
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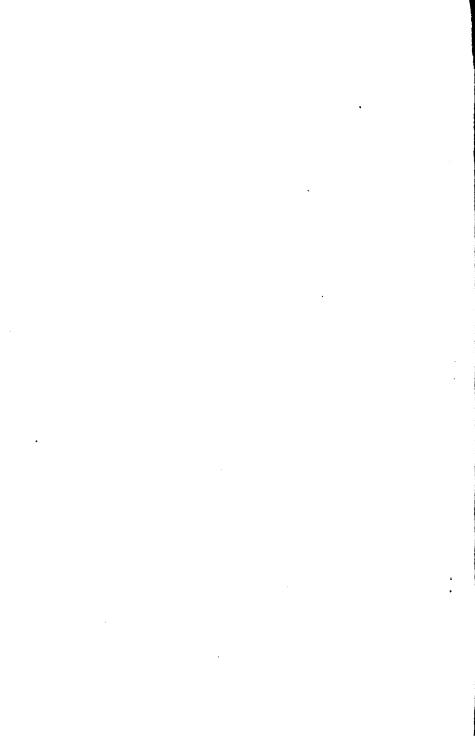
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# SIR HENRY IRVING BY HALDANE MACFALL

1 .





PORTRAIT OF IRVING BY HISTED



BY

### HALDANE MACFALL

AUTHOR OF "THE MASTERFOLK,"
"WHISTLER,"

JOHN W. LUCE & COMPANY

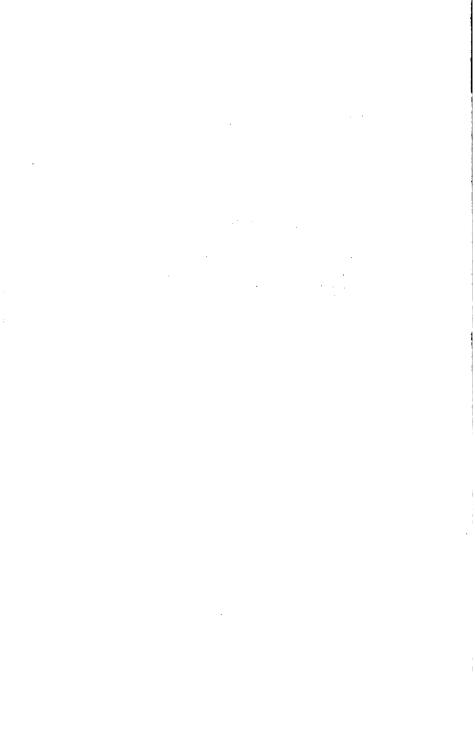


#### TO

### **ELLEN TERRY**

WHO

BY HER GENIUS ADDED TO THE LUSTRE OF HER GREAT COMRADE'S MAGNIFICENCE.



# ILLUSTRATIONS

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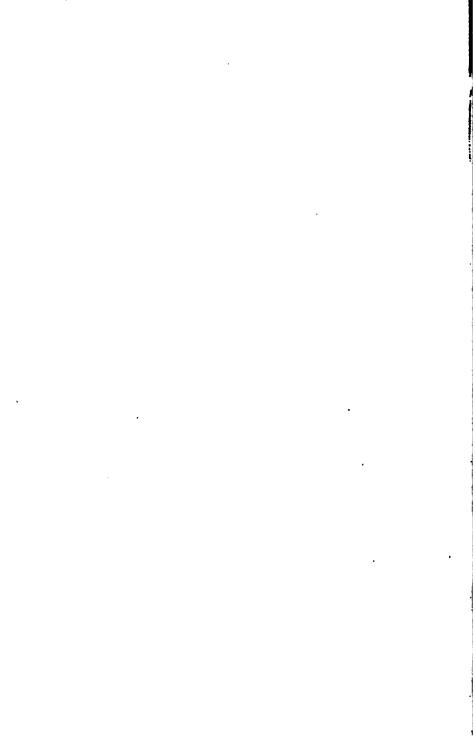
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IRVING AS
ROBESPIERRE
BY GORDON CRAIG





# THE MAN

"If I have in any way deserved commendation, I am proud that it is as an actor that I have won it."—Henry Irving.

The curtain of the mid-Victorian theatre rang up; and, at its slow uprising, discovered to the eyes of an astonished generation its greatest living tragedian. There stepped straight out of the world of romance, before the flare of the footlights of London town, stalking there across with tragic nervous stride, a tall slender figure that bore a dark sad face, and mouthed his mother-tongue with deliberate meaning, so that each spoken syllable took on its utmost value, each simplest phrase a full significance. Here strode a very evoker of the lurid, the sombre, the tragic that is in man. The face, of singular and melancholy beauty, distinguished, rare, and strange fascination, held romance in its every line, and was sombre with the

The lofty brow, with hint of doom. the shapely head of raven hair. The dark piercing eyes, brooding or dreaming, sinister or sad, that changed, swiftly tell-tale, to the thought that possessed them, flashing scorn or hate, or leering with cunning, growing black with malignity, holding contempt, or glaring enmity. The awe-inspiring glance. The black and heavy eyebrows, with their constant trick of expressive action, that moved atune to the mood that entered into the eyes, lifting with scorn or grim surprise, twitching with sardonic humour, or meeting in downward lines that scowled suspicion. Biting irony, cruelty, agony, the scoff, lurked in the betraying lines and corners of the mobile mouth, with its thin upper lip and heavy under one, about which pathos flickered even in the haunting smile. The high nose, with aquiline droop. The hollow cheeks. The gaunt jaws that held stern decision

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as in a vice, or fell apart in abject terror—the strong jaw and the great throat that jerked out and expelled the syllables of the spoken word with a force that compelled the imagination and riveted the attention. The superb gesture, absolute and right always. The wondrous hands, more eloquent than the speech of most men's mouths.

The man who thus thrust himself into the nation's eye, was possessed of a supreme artistic courage and of a dogged patience to become the master of his aims—he had, besides, the persistence that wears down opposition.

For, mark you, his high dramatic qualities were not thrust upon him as a gift from the lucky-bag of fairy-godmothers—he wrought his art of acting as a blacksmith works the formless iron into dextrous shape with heat and hammer upon the rigid anvil; and not the least of his creation was himself. His genius was from the gods, and his romantic per-



son—but his skill had to hew the art of acting as from a cold unshapely block of marble that has serious flaws.

He had a fierce struggle to raise himself from obscurity to fame; and he had bitter and powerful detractors who knew him not, except for the self-imposed task of being a hindrance to him—men who, seeing spots on the sun, deny the sun its whole effulgence.

He who would seize the crown of the realm he would conquer has first to fight a duel to the death, not with success but with failure. It is the difference of courage between genius and the amateur. And this man saw at very youth, that before he conquered the public he had to conquer himself. So, with deliberate eyes, the lank youth went into the desert and amongst strangers, and essayed to rid himself of the dross of his imperfections. He saw, with wide-eyed vision, that he must not only rise out of the gutter in which the

theatre lay, and in ruins, but that, with Hercules strength, he must drag the playhouse with him, and rebuild the wrecked drama.

With calculating courage, the youth set himself to the supreme effort.

And that concentrated will which he employed to shape his art of acting to fine ends, he also employed to shape his manhood, chiselling his entity to lofty purpose, until it became the envy of noble minds. . . .

That sedate dignity that sat so easily upon him, as his tall slender figure flitted before the footlights, lost nothing by being wedded to a grim sardonic humour; nor was it cast from him when he left the theatre. That same innate and commanding dignity was the handsome cloak he wore amongst his fellowmen to cover a genial and affectionate heart and a wide and silent charity. Indeed, there were those that made a sneer even of his charity.

Yet, who so mean in soul that he can read without a tightening at the throat, of that day when, meeting one who had gone downhill in his career as steadily as he himself had risen, Irving gave him the great chance of his life of a good part to play at the first theatre in the land? who can enter into the poor broken fellow's meagre lodging unmoved, and see him write the heartbroken message that he could not go to London to rehearsal of the part he had so eagerly accepted, for he lay seriously ill? who can see, without a stirring of the pulse, the door of that shabby lodging open some hours afterwards, and the greatest of living actors enter to spend a precious hour with the stricken lonely man? who so mawkishly afraid of appearing mawkish that he can read without a trembling of the lip how, when Irving's hour, snatched from the toil of a great theatrical venture, was flown, and the large-hearted man gone, the poor fellow arose and found a banknote for a hundred pounds upon his table, and the written assurance that the part would be kept for him until he could play it?

The impressive dignity of the man was freed from the dross of pomposity by a romantic vision and a fantastic imagination, wrought through and through and in and out with the golden thread of a free-handed generosity that was the rich embroidery of the habit in which he lived. Above all was it vivified and rendered glittering by a frank interest in things that was almost boyish. It was no formal disguise to an empty and barren soul.

Hishigh personal character was compact of generosity and amiability, arrayed in a splendid courtesy—an unvaunting generosity that was the gossip of the town; indeed, his lavish hands knew no hesitation where need pressed—an amiability in the presence of which his

enemies' upbraidings were silenced—a courtesy worthy of knight-errantry, a lesson to princes.

A thoroughly loveable man, he held his friends to him with blithe and unstinted affection. He was a staunch ally. Those who once stepped over the threshold of his acquaintance had difficulty in resisting the glamour of the temptation to become his friend, drawn by his wan smile. Even when bores put themselves upon him, he, with smiling good-humour and facile craft, slept through the tedium of their conversation without betraying his boredomor that he slept. He was accounted a good listener, wherein he accepted the ruling of that American wit who pointed out that in the design of creation, whilst we had been given two ears, we had been significantly adorned with but one mouth.

To his Saturday-night supper-parties in that room of his theatre that had been

the dining-place of old of "the Sublime Society of Beef-Steaks," he drew the wits and genius of his age.

He had the quick fence of words, the grim retort—skill to use the "sabrecuts of Saxon speech." As when he sent for the horse-dealer and asked him whether he had a safe horse on which to take the stage. The dealer, smelling a handsome bargain, swore by all the gods of jockeydom that he had one horse that had trod the stage for fifteen years. "Hein!" said Irving, his black eyebrows whimsically uplifting—"an actor, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has he any ugly faults, hein?"

"Well, sir—I must tell the truth—he pitched Mr Shose amongst the footlights on his first night, a while ago."

"Hein! A critic, too!"...

The impertinent rarely blundered a second time into drawing the embarrassing scowl from the deep shadow of

his piercing dark eyes—but with the humorous he was ever quick to toss back the sardonic quip, the grim fantastic retort. The impertinent he silenced with biting irony or shrivelled with scalding repartee.

Nay, even Whistler got his fall with Irving. It was the sprightly stinging rapier beaten down by the two-handed sword. Whistler was the life of a party, unless, by some misfortune, one of his own pictures hung upon the walls, when he would chatter nothing but Whistler until the end of the evening. He was a guest one night at one of Irving's Saturday suppers in the Beef-Steak room of the Lyceum Theatre, where hung his fine portrait of the actor as Philip of Spain. He talked of nothing else, would talk of nothing else, until everyone was weary of it. Whistler grew nettled, got to sneering, poured forth his theories that likeness did not matter, it was the masterpiece in colour that was the all in all—the face was of no more importance than the background—one day the sitter would be forgot, but the masterpiece would remain and the name of the artist endure. Now, that Philip of Spain was a masterpiece and the painter of it a master, a monstrous clever fellow—he would like to have known him. Irving smiled his enigmatic smile: "Hein! yes?—still, it is accounted a fine portrait of me in the part," said he—"indeed, I so account it; but—I—forget—who painted it."...

He bore no malice.

He loved his jest—against himself as against another. His indeed was the heartiest laughter when his old friend Toole told the story that he dreamed that he was dead and had ascended to the gates of heaven, but Saint Peter sternly refused him entrance, saying: "Mr Toole, no actors are admitted here." As he stood shivering in the

bitter cold without, he reasoned with Peter, saying his friend Irving had been allowed to enter Paradise—he had seen it in the evening papers—and he was an actor. But Peter shook his head: "No," said he—"Irving thought he was an actor, but he was not."...

He was hugely tickled with the New York reporter's praise of him as "a business-like Hamlet"; and still more with the greeting of that other American journalist who said: "I had heard, Mr Irving, that you had a vurry strange ac-cent, and I was agree'bly sur-prised to find that you spoke English as well as I do."...

Of Henry Irving, all who knew him spoke with affection; and none more than those who served him.

It is said that his stage was crowded with old actors who had outlived their repute, and whom Irving paid as though in the heyday of their powers. His passionate devotion to the theatre, and all that had to do with the theatre, was in nothing more marked than in his wide sympathy with, and kindness to, actors who were in trouble and distress. The tales of his stealthy generosity to such, like the tales of his grim humour, are legion.

Many are the stories of his kindnesses to his valets and dependants. Two of them, Doody and Collinson, were the heroes of more than one waggery. this Doody he would tell a story: had a dresser—his name was Doody hein! yes—his name was Doody—he was my servant—and my friend. I said to him one night—'Doody, you are drunk-and when you are drunk you are unpleasant—and when you are unpleasant I do not like you—and if I do not like you, we must part. You are the silliest fellow I ever saw in drink why do you do it? I wonder that, for the sake of your wife and children, you do not pull yourself together and stop

it. Besides—you look so ridiculous. Now, I don't get drunk every night—why should you?' 'Ah, sir,' said Doody with maudlin thick-voiced vanity—'you see, they makes so much of me!'"...

Irving was a picturesque figure always, well known even to the cabmen, whom, as he did the rest of the world, he treated lavishly. Of one of these wags of the road he used to tell that, when playing Shylock, he was once hard put to it to reach the theatre in time to dress for the part; and, getting hurriedly out of a cab, he absent-mindedly handed the driver a shilling. The cabby turned it over on his hand, weighed it, looked at it, then at Irving: "Well, guv'nor," said he-"if yer play the Jew inside the theatre as well as yer do outside, blowed if I don't spend your bloomin' shilling on a gallery to see yer do it."... Of false pride he had none.

When he was arrived at eminence, a

friend wrote to him that he had bought a letter of his, written in the days of his early struggles, asking his landlady for the loan of a shilling—would Irving like him to burn it? "No," said Irving, "keep it—I am proud of it."

He saw that his reputation, like his art, must be created anew every night. He saw that the essence of his whole craftsmanship was a fleeting and fugitive thing, like a song that is sung and vanishes with the breath of the singer and the music of the last note struck. So he wasted no time upon the side-issues of criticism or immortality. The actor has to clutch the bays between the curtain's rising and the curtain's fall. The rest was babble.

The actor wins his triumph every night. Irving had a splendid realm to conquer. He had to play the conqueror's part, and seize his domain by force. The little trivial things he lost by the way he left for the jackals to snarl over.

His place was amongst the great—and he took it—knowing full well the magnificent dread of usurpation, that it is easier to win a kingdom than to hold it. And, if he lost in some of his strenuous fights, shall we therefore so demean ourselves as to deny him his large conquests? He at least was guilty never of a mean surrender. Even when he fell, there was something of greatness in his fall.

It were as though one denied the claim of conqueror to Napoleon because he lost his. Leipzig and his Moscow. Perchance his enemies did.

He was a prodigious worker. When the oft-repeated rehearsal left even the minor players weary and worn out, his enthusiasm and his love of his art quickened him and kept him fresh, sitting there upon the stage, his keen eyes master of every detail, his skill knitting them together with the master-mind, directing every movement. Nothing



IRVING AS MACAIRE



escaped him. He was tireless; hard of brain. He never had an understudy. He was prodigal of himself. And; being ruthless to himself, he got from those who served him the utmost of their service. It stands to his credit and to his good breeding, more convincing than the oath of a sworn evidence, that those whom he used to their uttermost stretch of labour, his very carpenters and underlings, in their sly gossip behind his back were wont to speak of him with whispered pride in the impudence of their affection as "old Hank."

Upon his two sons he poured out the largess of his affection; and their various successes were the pride and glory of his closing years.

His grim sad smile, quizzical yet Sphinx-like, held something of the enigma that he always was; wherefore the world quarrelled bitterly over him. About him was something rare and

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distinguished, such as made him one apart from all men.

But of one thing he never left his generation in doubt. He had a shrewd eye for all things that were a part of his art. He worshipped that art—loved it—put it before all other considerations, before himself, nay, before his life. It was his life—his solace—his end.

He demanded social recognition for his calling; and when the Court dubbed him knight, he took the dignity for the honour of his craft, and straightway flung it aside like a theatric bauble amongst the properties of his wardrobe, except when he put the feather in his cap to strut it for the dignity of the theatre.

He kept the theatre pure. He made of the playhouse an ennobling influence on public life. He made the stage of the Lyceum one of the historic theatres of the world.

Before his life's work was near done,

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looking back upon the conquests he had won, he could say with a touch of pride in the achievement: "The time has long gone by when there was any need to apologise for the actor's calling." And with the pride of artistry he could lie down and die without shame in the practice of it.

He wore as his constant habit those qualities that his dignity embellished. Just and serene amidst the frantic din of the world, unspoilt by rebuff as by success, with a vast confidence in his aims and in his powers to achieve them, hestoodoutamongsthisfellowsthroughout his years like the grand old Roman that he was. He took the heroic strut, and could take it. Had occasion demanded, he must have done the heroic thing—the very art in him must have so compelled him. He could not stoop; nor did he ever.

When the most prominent of the nation passed before the eyes of the people

in the pageant of Victoria's fulfilled reign, it was his figure that stood for romance, picturesquely above them all. The man who was approved great in his art by the greatest of his day, by Browning, Dickens, Gladstone, Disraeli, George Eliot, Lytton, Tennyson, Coleridge, and their like, is assured of his It is out of the mouth of the great that the years will judge him. It is a part of the pathos of an actor's genius that, like the singer's, it can only be judged by his own generation. When death silences the player's tongue, his art is gone as though it had never been. His greatness becomes but a tradition; and no man's skill shall restore to us even the ghost of that which he wrought—his art lies buried with him—the story of his manhood and his triumphs alone remains. How Burbage spoke, or Betterton, or Garrick, who shall tell? how shall we pit them against Irving's magnificence?

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His sole significance lies in whether he so wrought in his art that he raised it in the people's estimate and thereby added to the dignity and splendour of his age.

And, for answer, his generation acclaimed this man as the greatest actor of his age; it saw that he was a noble-hearted and a great-souled gentleman; it dubbed him knight and gave him rank and honour who cared little for these things so that they but said he was a great actor; and when he lay still in death the people bared their heads in reverence as though a national calamity had fallen upon them, and placed his ashes with pomp and ceremony amongst the great dead that sleep in Westminster Abbey.

6 February 1838: 13 October 1905
"The lesson of toleration is not for the player alone; the preacher must learn it."—Henry Irving.

On the sixth day of February 1838, the young queen Victoria being but a few months come to the throne, there was born in the Somersetshire village of Keinton Mandeville, opposite to the Three Old Castles Inn, in that house of its single street of modest houses where mercer Samuel Brodribb dwelt, his only child John Henry Brodribb, who, as the actor Henry Irving, was destined to become one of the most distinguished figures of the young queen's long reign.

In this sleepy parish of the world time ticks but sluggishly; and when Irving visited it in after years he failed to remember anything of it, and had so far forgotten "the God-forsaken little vil-

lage," that he was unable to find the house in which he was born.

Samuel Brodribb, the father, seems to have been a rolling stone of commercial intent, a shiftless, restless, unprosperous man. But the mother, Mary Behenna, one of six sisters of Cornish stock, transmitted capacity, shrewd common sense, and keen foresight to her boy.

When the little fellow was four, his father and mother left Keinton and went to live in London, but his mother decided before they went that her son had better spend his childhood in the country than in the exhausted air of the gloomy city-street to which he would be condemned by their narrow means, and, with the grim courage inherited by the son, she tore herself from her boy, leaving him with her sister Sarah, who was married to a gigantic Cornish captain of mines, one Isaac Penberthy, settled at Halsetown by St Ives. So

the child passed out of the sleepy Somersetshire village where his sole remembered adventure was the little fellow's being severely mauled by a ram in Farmer Hoddy's field, to the more stirring life of a miner's day in far Cornwall, within hail of the eternal drama of the sea.

The parting from the gentle, loveable, devoted mother left its scar upon the child's heart; but the little fellow soon found comfort with his playfellows, the Penberthy children.

The great laughing giant, his uncle Isaac Penberthy, had all the Cornish love of adventure, and he would tell the eager imaginative boy wild stories of the days when he was manager of a Mexican mine. Of his aunt Penberthy Irving spoke always with pride and affection. "If ever there was a born queen, it is my aunt—a temperance Methodist," he said when he had arrived at greatnesss. "She came to

London not long since. I took her to see the Baroness Burdett-Coutts.... My aunt was the aristocrat of the meeting; she was the queen—she had a simple grand air of superiority; rather looked down, I daresay, upon what she would consider the worldly woman of London."

The fine character of this woman deeply influenced the boy. Tactful, cheerful, happy, she was of the Behenna blood which stood the actor in such good stead.

So the boy grew up till he was eleven, in the wild village set amidst the weird and desolate hills, their barren slopes marred with great heaps of disfiguring slack from the mines.

The nearest that he came to the acted drama in his childhood was a peep into the booth-shows at the Cornish fairs. The education in such a place in the early Victorian years was of the slightest. But the Bible was in every home

of the people, and it holds good literature and drama in abundance. Of the few books in the house, *Don Quixote* and a volume of old English ballads were all upon which the youngster could whet his imagination, and these made to glow the romance that was in him.

When the lad was ten years old, the big laughing captain of mines died.

At eleven years the boy saw the London that was to be the theatre of his greatness. He joined his parents at Bristol, and with them came up to their somewhat dingy home. But the lad's romantic mind peopled the busy city's thoroughfares and its drab streets with dreams, and made of its sombre ways an enchanted land.

He was sent to Dr Pinches' school in George Yard, Lombard Street, who took pride in teaching elocution to his boys for the speech-days that went before their breakings-up. Here the lad

made his mark; was cast for parts in Shakespeare's plays, and in Talfourd's tragedy of Ion caught the eye of Creswick, an actor of high repute. "Suddenly," says Creswick, "there came out a lad who at once struck me as being rather uncommon, and he riveted my attention. . . . I saw that he left his schoolfellows a long way behind. That schoolboy was Master Henry Irving." It was a year after he came to London, being then twelve, that in a state of wild excitement he first set foot in a theatre -it was at Sadler's Wells-the first play his eyes beheld was Hamlet—the first player Phelps. From that day, the youngster went to nearly every play that Phelps gave at the Wells. To the lad, this was not a mere pleasure-seeking but a self-imposed and glorious lesson. Before going to see a play, even as a boy he used to read it, form a theory as to how the whole drama should be played, and then go to the theatre to correct

his conceptions by those of the trained actors. Not only did he set his mind to mastering the playing of the parts, but also to mastering the management of the stage. He said that this had been of enormous value to him. The lighter forms of comedy had little appeal to him: from the first it was tragedy, and above all Shakespeare's tragedy, which called him.

At fourteen, the lad was taken from school and put into the offices of Thacker & Co., the well-known East India merchants. Here, as always, he did the work heundertook thoroughly and well. In Thacker's packing-rooms in Newgate Street, surrounded with everything under the sun, including books (for the great Indian shippers were also publishers), the clerks tallied the goods that went into the great tin-lined packing-cases; and there young Brodribb worked at his invoices and bills of lading, like any other city clerk. But his heart was

not in the counting-house, nor were his dreams of gold. From his boyhood, his eyes were on the stage; and though he hardly dared to hope it, the prospect of his ever becoming an actor being small indeed, he set to work to prepare himself for the stage by every means in his He went to his heart's desire alone, bending his stern will and a constant mind to the road that led thither. His father's lack of success and his feckless ways cost the son no doubts; the Behenna blood was in him, and his confidence in success determined it—his buoyant belief in himself rid him of the agonies which so often scar the youth of artistic temperament.

From his office work he filched no moment that belonged to his employers; but he robbed himself ruthlessly of every moment of his leisure, and with grim forthright labour set himself to master the whole art of the player. He pored over such books as his scanty purse could

buy. He learnt by memory poems and parts of plays; and to himself as sole audience he declaimed and acted them. On his way to and from his home for hismidday meal, he would stride through the crowded streets, learning aloud some speech or passage from the poets.

The youth eagerly seized advantage of the rage for elocution-classes which had come upon the town in the early 'fifties owing to Phelps's vogue; and, being then fifteen, joined the best of them, conducted by an actor, Henry Thomas, who, on the theory that dramatic utterance could only be learnt by the practice of it, gave no formal teaching, but made each member choose his piece and recite it to his comrades, who subjected it to the most searching criticism in their power. On the evening of his first appearance, he is described by one of his fellows as "rather tall for his age, dressed in a black cloth suit, with what was called a round jacket,

and deep white linen collar turned over it. His face was very handsome, with a mass of black hair, and eyes bright and flashing with intelligence. He was called upon for his first recitation, and fairly electrified the class with an unusual display of elocutionary skill and dramatic intensity." He was soon the most brilliant member. Here, as always, he won the affection of his fellows.

After a time the class moved to better quarters, when plays were given, and Irving got parts to act.

The young fellow had two serious defects, which he set himself with strenuous will to overcome—a stammer in his speech and an exceptionally halting stride.

Whilst at Thacker's, the youth came to know William Hoskins, one of Phelps's best actors; indeed, his intimate friendship with the comedian was destined to affect seriously his

whole after career. Hoskins, with generous kindness of heart and sincere affection—for his own work at the Wells was far from light and kept him late into the small hours of the night—seeing the great ability of the lank youth, gave him an hour's lesson in the art of the actor every morning at eight o'clock, Irving rising early and going to him before his day's work in the city began.

Irving also learnt dancing and fencing. His parents now grew alarmed at his devotion to, and passionate pursuit of, the art of acting; and he had to face his mother's distress.

Hoskins, on leaving England to live in Australia, when Irving was seventeen, strongly urged him to go with him; but Irving drew back before the piteous entreaties of his mother. Hoskins gave him a letter before he left: "You will go on the stage," said he. "When you want an engagement,



IRVING AS
BADGER
BY GORDON CRAIG



present this letter, and you will find one." At the same time he introduced the young fellow to Phelps, who offered him an engagement, adding with serious warning, "Have nothing to do with the stage; it is a bad profession." But the warning, and his mother's appeals, could not break down the young fellow's desire, so at eighteen Irving decided to leave the counting-house for the stage.

He refused Phelps's offer to appear at Sadler's Wells, deciding not to appear in London until he had thoroughly mastered the business of his art. Presenting his letter of introduction to Davis, a manager who was about to open a theatre in Sunderland, he was at once engaged as a member of the stock-company.

The stock-company was a permanent staff of actors attached to every theatre.

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The chief part was played by some "star" who visited the town, supported by the stock-company, who had to learn their parts very often at a few hours' notice. The life of these old stock-companies of the late 'fifties and early 'sixties, is it not writ in master fashion in Trelawney of the Wells? In those days of the genial, kindly, crude Bohemianism of the theatre of pitifully small salaries and piteously hard work, but few reached to success or the wide repute of becoming "stars"—they did their heavy work almost unnoticed—a line from the press was as though gold had fallen out of the blue. The personal paragraph, the photograph, the interview, were not. Toil was unending—Treasury-night a lean business—the actor a crude affair. The theatre was a dingy world apart lit up with the flare of the glory of gas at night—aloof from all—cut off from the social life about it as the life of the gipsies. The family of the local brewer

did not call, nor the parson's wife; marriages into the peerage were rare. The youth, Henry Brodribb, knew to what he was going; and he went. He knew that before he conquered the public he had to conquer himself. And he deliberately set himself to the supreme effort.

At last, at the age of eighteen, he saw his name upon the playbill of a theatre, and for the first time as Henry Irving, a name which he was destined to make illustrious.

On the 29th of September in that year of 1856 which saw the end of the war with Russia—some five months after a tiny little girl called Ellen Terry had first stepped before the footlights in The Winter's Tale at the Princess's Theatre in London—the New Royal Lyceum Theatre at Sunderland opened, and Henry Irving stood upon the stage as an actor in the part of the Duke of Orleans in Lytton's Richelieu.

He had taken great pains with the part; but he was nervous. He had to be on the stage when the curtain went up, and to speak the first line of the play: "Here's to our enterprise." He got stage-fright, and played badly. The audience was unfriendly—he had stepped into the shoes of a popular favourite who had fallen foul of the management. For a week, Irving was hissed every night; and he walked in a wretched condition the two dreary miles from the theatre to his poor lodgings.

His playing of Cleomenes in *The Winter's Tale*, a few nights later, was a dire disaster. He could not remember a word of his part. And though the prompter's voice was loud enough to be heard all over the house, he was unable to follow it; at last he had to walk off the stage amidst a storm of hisses.

Thereafter, besides playing minor parts, he also was cast for every sort of play;

saw many of the "stars" of the day; and began to make the friendship of several actors of rank. Irving, though pressed to remain, early in the new year left Sunderland for Edinburgh, where he hoped for wider and fuller training. From February 1857, the year of the Indian Mutiny, as a member of the company of the Theatre Royal at Edinburgh, he spent two and a half years of the severest part of his apprenticeship to his art.

To realise the drudgery and toil of the old stock-company days, it may give some idea of the unceasing labour of this youth of nineteen to twenty-one, if it be grasped that in those two and a half years he played four hundred and twenty-eight characters—that he had to play a new part nearly every night—from the highest Shakespearian tragedy and comedy down to an old woman and the buffoon's fooling in pantomime, farce, burlesque, and melodrama. Of a

truth, thirty shillings a week was not easily earned in the drama. It was an appalling discipline. It was a splendid training. And now that the stockcompany is swept away, it seems unlikely that such a training can again advantage the young actor. The long run, in the provinces as in London, keeps the young actor tied to a single

part for hundreds of nights.

Irving's first part in Edinburgh was, odd to say, the Duke of Orleans to Barry Sullivan's ranting roaring Richelieu. Amongst other "stars" came Helen Faucit, and Toole, whose long friendship with Irving dates from this time. For two or three weeks of "rest" in the June of 1859, the Surrey Theatre saw him playing small parts; but he was back again in Edinburgh by the end of the month. A good offer from London came soon afterwards, and, to feel his way, he closed with it. September saw him take his farewell benefit

at Edinburgh as Claude Melnotte in *The Lady of Lyons*, and the delivery of his first speech to an audience from before the footlights.

He left Edinburgh wholly unrecognised as an actor—the press passed him over in silence, or at best gave him a rare line or two of formal and faint praise. Adversity but strengthened his will.

Irving's three years' London engagement at the Princess's Theatre began in September, when he found himself cast for six lines in Oxenford's Ivy Hall. Humiliated, and seeing no better prospect of getting good parts at the theatre, he went to his manager, persuaded him to release him, and turned his steps to Scotland again—not, however, before he had given two public readings, The Lady of Lyons and the trash in five acts called Virginius, which brought him his first taste of the praise of the great London newspapers. He determined only to return to the Lon-

don stage again when he could make a mark upon it.

At twenty-two, Irving went to the Theatre Royal at Glasgow; leaving, the following September, to join the stock-company of the Theatre Royal at Manchester, and for nearly five years earned his salary of thirty shillings in that town, with an occasional benefit, "which generally resulted in a loss of about twenty pounds."

The number of parts he there played was again prodigious. He at first found his Lancashire audiences difficult. He came to the conclusion that they were right. He had to work without applause. But slowly, by sheer hard work, he won their affection.

At twenty-six, he had very greatly improved his position, and was playing quite important parts—Faust, Claude Melnotte, and Mercutio. On the 20th of June he boldly decided to play Hamlet for his own benefit.

Up to this time, in spite of his great versatility, Irving was looked upon, even by his fellow actors, as a light comedian, and a light comedian only; and his intention to play Hamlet was at first taken as a huge joke. But his popularity amongst them aroused all their skill to try and enable him to achieve his ambition.

He received a warm welcome on his appearance, which a little unnerved him. But his success was pronounced; and the applause of the packed theatre was astoundingly enthusiastic. He was called before the curtain after every act. The critics also treated him well.

Irving's days at Manchester were now numbered. The Davenport Brothers were gulling the country with their spiritualistic "dark seances." Irving, Day a fellow actor, and Macabe the conjurer went, detected the swindle, and decided to expose it. They worked up their tricks, and gave a rival show. The ex-

posure of the swindlers' "blasphemous pretensions" was so amusing that it had to be repeated. The manager, seeing profit in the business, asked Irving to do it for money at the theatre; but this was a degrading of the holy of holies itself. The dignity of the theatre was Irving's religion. Hisrefusal caused friction; and he left Manchester.

He now found some difficulty in getting work, strolling from Edinburgh, where he played Macaire for the first time, to Bury, where he again made his mark as Hamlet; thence to Oxford, on to Birmingham, where he was voted "bad as bad could be"; thence to Liverpool, where at last, acting with Sothern in the production of The Favourite of Fortune, he bid for power against Sothern himself and came near to winning it. But there was now being woven into the web of his life a factor that was to lift him to recognition. Boucicault at once saw the young fellow's

abilities. Boucicault was a man of considerable genius. Realising that the melodrama was the only form of serious play which had a chance of success in his generation, Boucicault accepted its limitations, but he wrote into its form a series of character-studies that lifted it into a work of art. be it remembered, even Shakespeare wrote rank melodrama on occasion. Boucicault produced The Two Lives of Mary Leigh, an awkward title which he changed to Hunted Down, at the Prince's at Manchester in July 1866, with Kate Terry as heroine, and engaged Irving to play his now famous part of Rawdon Scudamore; his judgment was splendidly justified. Irving played the blackguardly adventurer of polished manners with rare distinction. Boucicault was asked to produce the play in London; he accepted the offer on the condition that Irving appeared as Rawdon Scudamore. Irving's hit in the

part had been noised abroad and reached Tom Taylor, who promptly offered him an engagement in town, but Irving was loyal to Boucicault.

The tide of his fortunes had now turned. His ten years' apprenticeship to his art was at an end. When, at twenty-eight, he bade farewell to his life in the provinces, he had played close on six hundred characters; and his range was as extraordinary as the number of his parts.

Irving had now to win his London audience. In the October of 1866 the St James's Theatre was opened by a competent actress, under the stage-name of Miss Herbert, a woman more remarkable, however, for that fragile and delicate beauty which inspired the Æsthetic Movement that was coming upon the town, with Swinburne and Rossetti for its poets, Rossetti, Burne Jones, Whist-

ler, Madox Browne, and William Morris for its artists, Ruskin for its preacher, Oscar Wilde for its prophet, "culture,""intense,""utter,"and"consummate" for its catchwords, Botticelli for its god, and Du Maurier for its exquisite caricaturist. Her spiritual face, languishing manner, and slender figure became the fashion amongst the women; she stepped into church windows, took her languid way across the painted canvas, and was worshipped and imitated in the London drawing-She had the ambition to do for the stage what her worshippers were doing for the arts of poetry and painting.

Her decision to open her season at the St James's with Boucicault's Hunted Down brought Irving to the London stage, and she made him her stage-manager. At the last moment the old eighteenth-century play of The Belle's Stratagem was put on, and Irving found

himself at short notice compelled to the embarrassment of making his entry before the London public as Doricourt, a part which he did not know. He was distressed with the feeling that he did not reach nor hold his audience during the first scenes as the polished aristocrat who, on return from the grand tour, finds the English beauties insipid, and he was vexed with the dread that failure would ruin his career, when suddenly, on his exit from the scene where he feigns madness, he was startled by a burst of applause, and the enthusiasm was so great that one critic feared the audience would commit the real lunacy of encoring his mock-madness.

In Hunted Down, which followed, Irving repeated his success as the cool, calm, shameless, dissipated, and implacable villain Rawdon Scudamore, and caught the eye of Dickens, who was struck by his "singular power," whilst

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George Eliot deemed him the greatest living actor.

Amongst the several pieces that followed, Irving played Joseph Surface, Macaire, and in the play from Ouida's Idalia he and Miss Herbert and Charles Wyndham were warmly received. was in July of this year that he made his only appearance in Paris, supporting Sothern, who played Dundreary to cold audiences. October saw him at the Princess's supporting the American comedian J. S. Clarke in his performance of Major Wellington de Boots, which got on the town. The end of the year brought to an end also his engagement at the St James's. In his first year in London he had secured a good footing; was known to his audiences, and noticed by the press.

In the October that Irving was supporting Clarke as Wellington de Boots, the new theatre in Long Acre, decorated by Albert Moore, was opened

by Labouchere under cover of Wigan, as the Queen's Theatre, with a company that included Charles Wyndham, Lionel Brough, John Clayton, Ellen Terry, Nellie Farren, and the brilliant parliamentarian's future wife Henrietta Hodson. On Boxing Night Irving and Toole were of the splendid company, Irving being again stage-manager. Irving played Petruchio to Ellen Terry's Kate, their first performance together. The part did not suit him. When Oliver Twist was put on, Toole was the Artful Dodger, an unforgetable performance, and Lionel Brough the Bumble, whilst Irving played Bill Sikes, made up closely on Cruikshank's design. His terrible picture of savage ferocity added to his increasing reputation. In July he was playing Faulkland in The Rivals with John Clayton and Charles Wyndham, two of his closest and most intimate friends, and was with them in the long run of The

Lancashire Lass which followed; but in the plays that span out the rest of his engagement he had little chance of further distinguishing himself. left the Queen's Theatre at thirty-one with slowly increasing reputation. Wyndham, his constant friend of forty years, left the theatre almost at the same time. They had struggled and hoped together through the lean early years of poverty and obscurity—they came up to London almost togetherdrifted into the same dressing-room in the same theatre of St James's—they crossed over to the Queen's Theatre within a month or so of each other, and again to the same dressing-roomand they left the Queen's Theatre within a month of each other, and, but for Wyndham's accepting an engagement at Wallack's Theatre, they would have been together at the Lyceum.

In this last year of the 'sixties, at thirty-

one, Irving married Florence, daughter of Surgeon-General O'Callaghan of the Indian Army. His eldest son, H. B. Irving, was born in the following year, and his second son, Laurence, the year after; both inherited much of the father's genius, and were an eternal source of pride to him. The marriage does not seem to have been happy: four years afterwards husband and wife separated.

From his happy days amongst friends at the Queen's he went to the sorry fiasco of All for Money at the Haymarket, thence to a stagey villain's part at Drury Lane in Boucicault's Formosa, which he detested. Toole was about to produce Uncle Dick's Darling, and Irving persuaded his old friend Hollingshead of the Gaiety, who was a friend of the Drury Lane manager, to get him released from the run of Formosa. When Toole produced Byron's play with large success at the Gaiety in December,



POSTER
DON QUIXOTE
BY THE BEGGARSTAFF BROTHERS



Irving, in his Dombey-like Reginald Chevenix, made himself up as Disraeli, and Clayton appeared to the wags as "the Prince of Wales in corduroys." Dickens, in the Royalbox, where he was received by the audience in a manner generally reserved for kings, spoke in high praise of Irving, and prophesied for him a great career.

Irving was now an actor who had arisen from the sea of capable ordinary men who practise an art. His was a fascinating personality. His work had that breadth and power that cannot be taught, but grips the attention and holds audiences. Critics and public alike applauded and congratulated him—yet his name was misspelt by two leading newspapers, and the *Era Almanach* omits it from the list of leading actors of this, his thirty-first year.

In the April of 1870 he went to the new theatre hard by—the Vaudeville—where he played the sanguine im-

postor, Alfred Skimmington, in For Love or Money; but he was on the threshold of a great success that was to lift him into a leading place amongst the comedians of his day. In June, at thirty-two, he appeared as Digby Grant in Albery's comedy of Two Roses. the beginning of the run he was fairly well received, but his high artistry gradually grew into the eyes of his audiences, and thrust him into wide notoriety. He played with rare art and fine restraint the plausible liar and accomplished blackguard under the cloak of the highly bred aristocrat, whose splendid insolences cover sheaves of debts-one who takes a loan with the air of granting a favour, who, when he owns a debt, considers that he has paid There was no exaggeration such as that to which the stage was used. On the two hundred and ninety-first night of the piece he aroused a profound sen-He had been looked upon as a

grimly humorous comedian. He recited Hood's ballad of Eugene Aram, and the sensation was profound—it became the talk of the town. He revealed, at a stroke, tragic powers of such intensity that he startled criticism out of all its estimate of him. His range of command over the public became at once widened, he burst into a larger sea of human emotion, and added tragedy to his assured domain. He paved the way for that great essay into the tragic which was to place him at the head of his profession.

He was about to step on to the stage of the Lyceum, to which he was destined to bring such rare distinction; which he was to make the first theatre in the land, one of the theatres of the world. The playhouse had long been accounted unlucky; and actors are as superstitious as sailors. Irving was to bring fortune and fame to the old house such as none dreamed of. He was there to

become a part of the national asset. Whether liked or disliked, he was to be feverishly discussed; and not to have seen him in each new play was to be out of the mode.

Hezekiah L. Bateman, known as "The Colonel," and father of Kate Bateman, who as Leah had made an immense impression at the Adelphi in that year in which Irving went on to the stage, settled in England and took the Lyceum in 1871 to exploit his daughter Isabel in London. He engaged Irving as leading Bateman was wont to boast that he had discovered Irving; but he showed little sign of recklessness in his behalf when he engaged him. whole intention was to make his daughter a star, and the first play, Fanchette, was written solely to that end. It was a pitiful failure—Isabel Bateman not having the training to play the part.

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Albery's Pickwick, founded on Dickens's novel, quickly followed, and its central figure, Jingle, played by Irving, though a fine study of an impudent scamp, seems to have lacked the rattle and blackguardly audacity which he afterwards acquired when he recast it in later years as Jingle. The American manager again suffered loss, and was on the eve of giving up the theatre and leaving England, when Irving, with passionate appeal, pressed The Bells For days the disheartened upon him. manager hung back. The playgoer of the day had no taste for the tragic—he went to the theatre to laugh loud and long at "a good healthy farce" or "a pretty comic opera with good-lookin' gals and a song and dance." ceum was unpopular, and unlucky, and voted gloomy. The leading actor was all but unknown. . . . Irving doggedly pressed the play upon him. His enthusiasm at last got a lodging in Bateman's

brain; the play was put into rehearsal. The Bells was played on the night of the 25th of November 1871, in the thirty-third year of Irving's life, to a scant audience, already rebuffed by two failures. It was a turning-point in the history of the English stage. effect on that audience was astounding. From the time that Mathias, living in the sunshine of an honoured and successful life, but a prey to the inner hell of remorse for the awful crime that had put that success within his grasp, enters his home where his daughter is about to be wed, Irving held his audience with that calm, deliberate power that raised him to genius. This man realised that in all acting, but above all in tragedy, the actor must get his audience spellbound before he can interpret to them his emotions—grip his audience from the moment he appears, thrust himself upon that audience, and hold it in the hollow of his hand every mo-

ment he is before the footlights until the last curtain fall—not to try to get the applause of the groundlings with bursts of rhetoric or big moments. And he so gripped them that November night that not one of them all moved or stirred, from the moment when he walks into his house out of the snow, and finds his old friends talking of the murdered Jew-through the tense moods when he finds the blood-stained piece of gold in the dowry he is counting out for his girl-to the grim passage where her young lover, the intelligent officer of police, is telling his ambition to unravel that old murder, and unwittingly guesses the truth of its manner of doing-to the awful agony of the murderer's dream that he is being tried for it, mesmerised by the fellow he saw at the fair that day, and confesses it to the court—and so to the end when he leaps out from the great hanging curtains of his bed as his room is

broken into by his alarmed family, and he, struggling to tear the halter from his throat with the hoarse cry, "Take the rope—from—about—my—neck," falls dead into a chair.

The effect upon his audience was profound; they arose and shouted applause; the critics rushed off to record it. The next morning, Irving found himself famous.

Lord Lytton was warm in his admiration, and loudly voiced his envy of the author whose plays should have the good fortune to be interpreted by such an actor.

At first, Irving played Jingle after The Bells, then Jeremy Diddler in Raising the Wind.

So Irving brought fortune to the manager of the Lyceum, and stepped into a commanding position on the stage. Bateman, though yet far from realising the power of his leading man, was now more easily persuaded into belief

in his judgment and capacity—though not too easily.

Wills wrote for him a play dealing with Charles the First, in which the real hero, one of the great heroes of the world, is befouled in order to belaud and make graciously sublime the schoolgirls' hero, one of the most contemptible of kings, a liar, a betrayer of his friends, a slave to indecision, whose weak will was an object of contempt even to his wife, a man whose sole claims to heroism were pride in his rank and the knowing how to die. But he wore pretty clothes. And the whitewashing of Charles gave Irving a chance of dignified and kingly acting, of which he fully availed him-Excitement ran high on the first He was acknowledged to have dramatic power as well as comedy; but criticism spoke with a smile of his attempting pathos and dignity. Hehad, in The Bells, plumbed the deeps of terror; he now scaled the topmost heights of

pathos. Irving's stately melancholy, his kingly dignity and tenderness, varied by bursts of righteous indignation, as when he rebukes Cromwell and Ireton and taunts the treacherous Moray, raised the shallow and false play to sublime tragedy. His Charles the First was a consummate and deeply moving achievement. It ran to crowded houses.

Wills followed up his success with the tragedy in which Irving appeared as Eugene Aram in the April of his thirty-fifth year, and repeated much of his triumph in *The Bells*. His force roused widespread enthusiasm. Critics and audience vied in praising him.

Lytton's Richelieu was next put on the stage. The excitement was astounding. The first night saw the house filled with the leaders of fashion, art, law, and letters. The reception given to Irving was very great; though this wild enthusiasm was not shared by the whole press. A weak play, Philip, followed.

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In his thirty-sixth year, Irving decided to put his reputation to the touch, and play before a London audience a part which, if he had failed in it, must have wrecked his position on the stage. The night of the 21st of October of 1874 was a fateful one for the English drama. Failure would have thrust back the dramatic revival and silenced or gagged the stage as the mouthpiece of the intellectual and emotional life of the nation. He was fully alive to the disaster of defeat, and his anxiety as the call-boy warned that the curtain was about to go up must have been painfully acute. The excitement of the public all day was intense—feverish. Midday saw a closely packed crowd at the pit door. His Hamlet was the talk of the town. When the door opened, the theatre was carried by storm. Yet the company was not a strong one. There had been no attempt to mount the play handsomely, though the simplicity did not

stoop to the rudeness of his early days, when the skull in the grave-scene was a turnip, and the poison was drunk out of an empty jam-pot. Still, much of the scenery would be well known to the Lyceum pittite. London had come to see Irving as Hamlet.

When the curtain rang up, Irving's fears must have lessened, for the enthusiastic welcome that he received from the packed house on his entrance showed at least that he had not to undergo the heavy strain of overcoming opposition.

His simple black apparel was skilfully chosen, so as to concentrate the attention on the wonderful face and hands.

He, as was now his habit, put out all his powers to hold his audience from the start and never to lose it, and all the strength of his calm, magnetic personality was in the effort; but, for the first two acts he played to a silent house. His fatigue at this point must

have broken down a less vigorous will. His state during those first two acts, played to an absolutely silent house, must have been pitiable.

In the third act, in the scene with the players, he knew at last that he held his audience, and he played with intense power. As the curtain rang down on the act, the vast audience realised that it had not been given to their generation to see such a Hamlet. The curtain fell to a mighty shout, and the roar of the people's applause rid the actor of all doubt as to his powers to achieve the heights of his art. That shout opened to him the whole realm of Shakespeare's genius.

He uttered no single phrase to make theatrical points, he never once attempted to force a situation, nor essayed rhetorical flights nor the exaggerative top-note—never tried to raise temporary applause. His Hamlet was a prince, whose sense of justice would

not permit him to save his own comfort while murder sat unpunished on his father's throne. He hated tragic acts, but his day-dreams and philosophisings must go, and his body take cruel risks. He steeled his will to vengeance, to that which was wholly repugnant to his gentle disposition. Everything he loved had to give way to duty. Yet his whole easy nature held him from moving swiftly to vengeance. Every step he took was an agony to him; he braced himself to justiceit was his arm only that could do it, that ought to do it. And he took up the burden of his manhood and kept the awful commandment. When the conscience-stricken king started from his chair, and Hamlet, leaping from the ground, darting in behind him, flung himself into the seat with a harsh cry of triumph, the effect on the audience was terrible; and by the time the pictures scene with his mother was

over, the emotional strain was with the audience; the remaining acts were played amidst the maddest enthusiasm. No such tragic actor had been seen by the living generation.

Irving at once usurped a commanding position in the country. The magazines burst into praise and abuse; a fierce war of pamphlets raged. Henceforth, the first night of a Lyceum play became almost a State function. Each Shakespeare play was produced amidst uproar in the press.

In the March of 1875, in the height of good fortune, Bateman suddenly died. The theatre passed to his widow.

Irving was cast for and played Macbeth in the autumn. His detractors were loud in their delight at his half-success, and the choice of Othello to follow seems to have been prompted by an evil fate—for though his admirers gave him an astounding ovation, his Othello failed to repeat the triumph of his Hamlet.

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Tennyson's poor play of Queen Mary followed, in which Irving did the best that could be done with the cold, proud, sneering Philip of Spain. And though Tennyson himself deemed it one of any actor's greatest performances, its chief claim to fame is that it produced Whistler's great portrait of Irving in the part. The Bells and The Belle's Stratagem were revived, and showed Irving's versatility every night. At Irving's benefit, Helen Faucit (Lady Martin) appeared for the last time on the London stage. The autumn saw his triumphant tour of the provinces.

It was at this time that, in one of the papers, a foul charge of suborning the press compelled Irving to step from his usual custom and punish the editor at law. Salvini's visit to London was made the occasion for an attack upon Irving, and he was charged with jealousy of, and undisguised enmity to, the great Italian. It caused Irving the



IRVING AS
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B: GORDON CRAIG



deepest distress. His enemies were now very active.

Indeed, Irving's progress had been severely checked; for, of a truth, his reputation had steadily sunk during the series of plays that followed Hamlet. But his great position was to be vindicated at the beginning of 1877, when, at thirty-nine, he appeared as Richard the Third. He went back to the original text. The play was beautifully staged, Hawes Craven showing high artistry in making the stage-picture a splendid enhancement to the acting. Irving's mastery of scorn and malignity and sarcasm found full vent in the early scenes; of the king's craft and cunning Irving gave a wondrously convincing interpretation. As in The Bells, and later in Louis the Eleventh, his very tricks of speech and stride enhanced his every act. It was a great performance, and lifted Irving to the topmost heights of artistic achievement once more.

Irving had again turned his steps into the way of success. Richard the Third was followed by Dubosc in *The Lyons Mail*. Irving played the two parts of Dubosc, the villainous leader of a gang of desperate thieves, and the innocent Lesurques, who was condemned by mistake for Dubosc, whom he resembles.

After a tour of the provinces, which was again a triumphal progress through the great cities, Irving, in his fortieth year, was to create one of the greatest masterpieces of his life in Louis the Eleventh. Adapted by Boucicault from Delavigne's play, the part of the King gave Irving the chance for a superb display of his consummate gifts of sardonic humour and grim tragedy. Here again his very mannerisms enhance the playing of the part. And with what rare art Irving keeps the majesty of kingship amidst the constant changes of mood of the villainous old bigot, through terror

and cowardice, through remorseless cruelty and astute statecraft-through the suspicion of every living soul-the quick, lynx-eyed perception of the unwitting betrayal of Nemours by his betrothed under his wily cajolings—the making of terms with the priest and the doctor for his soul and life-the pleading for just one more little sin, that he might wreak his will on his enemythe sinking of the old king into death, and when the Court thinks he has gone, and the Dauphin tries on the crown, the stirring of the old fox that quells the Court into terror of his kingly will! It was wondrous master-work, such as it grieves one to think the world can see no more.

When three months were run, the play was succeeded by *The Flying Dutchman*, with Irving as Vanderdecken. This weird part, played with rare distinction, was not a popular success, and the piece was early withdrawn.

At the end of the year, Bateman's widow retired from the management of the Lyceum, and Irving, in his fortieth year, became possessed of the playhouse which his genius had already raised to the highest position in the land. He was now able to carry out his dreams of producing plays as a consistent whole in a setting worthy of them; and of attracting to him a company of the best actors that could be engaged. With shrewd foresight, his first act on getting into management was to select Miss Ellen Terry to strengthen the cast. The last day but one of the year saw the revival of Hamlet with Ellen Terry as an exquisite Ophelia. In April, they were playing in The Lady of Lyons; but Claude Melnotte was a part not well suited to the actor. After a series of revivals, Irving produced Colman's The Iron Chest, in which gloomy play, as Sir Edward Mortimer, he did excellent work. But a summer

cruise in the Baroness Burdett-Coutts's vacht turned his eyes to Venice, and the first of November saw the curtain go up on the beautiful scenes that Hawes Craven, Telbin, Hann, and Cuthbert had designed as the splendid setting to one of Irving's most masterly performances in the part of Shylock, and to the blithe Portia of Ellen Terry. The great tragedy of The Merchant of Venice, even by Shakespeare mistaken for a comedy, roused fierce controversy in the press; but, take what side we will, the malignity, and it is a dignified malignity, of the oppressed Jew in his hopeless struggle against the brutality of the curse which lies upon his race is the core of the play; and it is perhaps none the less tragic, in that Shakespeare himself did not wholly realise the caddishness of such a man as Gratiano, the type of the tormentor of an oppressed people. Irving lifted the part to greatness; so great and

human a performance of Shylock can never be surpassed. It may not have been the Jew that Shakespeare drew; indeed, if so, it was far greater.

The curtain-raiser to this play was Pinero's first play, *Daisy's Escape*. Wills's *Iolanthe* was added later to the bill.

When the Lyceum Theatre had been rebuilt, after the fire of 1830, a special room was designed for the old Sublime Society of Beef-Steaks, where they held their Saturday dinners until they broke up in the late 'thirties. Their interesting old Beef-Steak room had become a lumber room. Irving restored it to its hospitable purpose; and in that room was hung Whistler's famous portrait of Irving as Philip of Spain. The actor gathered to his Saturday suppers some of the most distinguished men of society and wit of his day. Here was to be heard some of the best talk of London and America. A man



IRVING AS ROBESPIERRE

of tact and courtesy and unbounded generosity, the aristocrat vied with the wit for the distinction of his intimacy. Whether here or at his rooms in Grafton Street, the first door on the left as one turns out of Bond Street, where he gathered together his collection of theatrical curios, or in the garden of his picturesque old red house, The Grange, that faces Brook Green in Hammersmith, he was a charming and delightful host.

The autumn of 1880 saw Irving in The Corsican Brothers. Tennyson's The Cup followed—it was a poor affair.

The year after, Booth, the great American tragedian, came to London with high hopes. Badly managed, coming to the wrong theatre, with a poor company and wretched scenery, he lost money—and heavily. Irving came to his aid, and, persuading him over to the Lyceum, revived *Othello* with great splendour, playing. Othello and Iago

alternately with him. It was a remarkable performance. In Iago, Irving showed great powers.

In November of this, his forty-third year, Irving delivered his address at Edinburgh, entitled *The Stage as It Is*—an address in which he appealed for the national recognition of the dignity of his profession.

In 1882, Irving produced Romeo and Juliet with a romantic splendour that well suited the great love-tragedy of the world; but Irving was never a master of the love-note—it was wholly outside his gamut.

Much Ado About Nothing followed, and showed Irving in his finest achievement in high comedy. It was a splendidly produced play, brilliantly acted, by a very powerful cast. Irving's Benedick and Ellen Terry's gay Beatrice were played to the Claudio of Forbes Robertson, the Dogberry of Sam Johnson, the Don Pedro of Terriss, and the Hero

of Miss Millward. This great production was only withdrawn for a series of revivals with an eye on an American tour; and Irving's speech at his benefit, on the 28th of July, was spoken amidst a frenzy of enthusiasm. At the great banquet given in his honour, Lord Coleridge voiced the nation when he paid his tribute to the man's great genius and consummate artistry.

When Irving first visited America, he was forty-five, and at the height of his powers. His was a commanding position.

His tour through America was a royal progress. When he made his farewell speech, it was but to promise a return to them the next autumn "for a parting embrace—a six months' embrace."

On his return, in the summer of 1884, his forty-sixth year, Irving produced Twelth Night at the Lyceum, and created the finest Malvolio the stage is ever likely to behold, to the delightful Viola

of Ellen Terry. The part suited Irving's grotesque and grim humour; but the play did not have a long run.

It was during his ensuing tour in America that Irving delivered to the Harvard students his now well-known address on *The Art of Acting*.

The May of 1885 saw him in Wills's Olivia as Doctor Primrose at the Lyceum. Then, as Mephistopheles in Wills's Faust, which was mounted with lavish magnificence, he won a stupendous success. Indeed, the sardonic humour of Irving fitted him to the part as closely as his handsome red habit suited his tall, slender body, and, with the pathos of Ellen Terry's Marguerite, raised the mediocre play to deserved success.

At thirty-eight, Irving, under the goodwill of Jowett of Oxford fame, delivered an address to that University on four great English actors, which was as beautiful in phrasing as it was masterly in treatment. About this time occurred

the heated discussion in print between Irving and Coquelin on the art of acting, which ended in the close friendship of the two men. Coquelin laid stress on mimetic acting. Irving held that, whilst the sinking of the individuality of the actor in the stage portrait was important in comedy, it was of minor interest in tragedy, where the emotions are all-important and far more vital than the portrayal of the mere outer habit of the man.

Irving was then seen in Lord Byron's dull play of Werner, in Macaire, and in The Amber Heart. But the next great run was in the revival of Macbeth, which was remarkable for its artistic scenery, for the appearance of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth, and the painting of her world-famed portrait in the part by Sargent. Irving and Ellen Terry then visited the provinces to give readings from Macbeth.

On the 15th of June 1889, in his fifty-

first year, he took the name by royal licence of John Henry Brodribb Irving. There followed the stupid play of *The Dead Heart*, in which Bancroft returned to the stage.

In the September of 1890, Irving's playing of the doomed lover in Ravenswood, Merivale's dramatisation of Scott's Bride of Lammermoor, gave him a part that fitted his outer man. His scenepainters supported him with fine craftsmanship. But just as Irving's sense of humour failed him for once on the first night, when he roused a titter amongst the gods by Ravenswood's desperate courage in shooting an infuriated bull out of the window with the tragic utterance: "There is no cause for fear" so Merivale failed to repeat his success of Forget Me Not in not giving Irving a wide enough gamut for the exercise of his genius. Nevertheless, it added to Irving's range, and nearly proved him a stage lover.

In Henry VIII., Irving's success as a stage-manager of pageant overshadowed his playing of Wolsey; yet in the subtle acting of this part he showed high artistry and keen dramatic skill, adding another great portrait to his gallery of masterpieces.

King Lear did not add to his reputation. On his fifty-fifth birthday, with wondrous skill he played Becket in Tennyson's much altered tragedy, and won an astounding popularity. It was an indifferent play. Yet Irving made of the part a subtle and interesting study, and a most convincing portrait. His delivery was never more pure, his faults never less in evidence. His reception on the first night was stupendous—a stirring, an unforgetable thing.

A year and a half afterwards, at Bristol, in Conan Doyle's A Story of Waterloo, by his very great acting of the old veteran Corporal Gregory Brewster, he

created a superb character-study of garrulous senility.

When, in the January of 1895, the drama of King Arthur, as seen through the not very powerful poetry of Comyns Carr, the jaundiced but ethereal eyes of Burne-Jones, and the music of Sullivan, was put upon the stage, the success lay more with the all-round playing of the parts by Irving, Ellen Terry, Lena Ashwell, Genevieve Ward, and Forbes Robertson, and in its Burne-Jones atmosphere, than with any personal greatness in Irving.

Don Quixote will be remembered more for the superb poster designed for it by the Beggarstaff Brothers, than for the genius of Wills, who wrote it. Yet Irving caught much of the haunting sense of the grave knight of the melancholy countenance.

In the July of this year, Irving, being then fifty-seven, was knighted by the Queen at Windsor.

### HIS CAREER

Irving's whole passion was for his art, and for the dignity of his calling. saw that that calling could not be raised to dignity until the members of it won social equality with those of the other arts—and that without such dignity it must remain in the gutter, ashamed and destitute. The question whether knightly rank should be jealously safeguarded for knightly deeds and feats of arms has been long solved by the simple fact that it is not so. Knighthood has become the title whereby the King, as the fountain of honour, gives the distinction of Court recognition to men who have distintinguished themselves in their divers callings.

Irving had no taste for "smart" people; he was a splendid Bohemian of the best type, but he rightly, deliberately, and most properly claimed, with rare dignity, that the profession of the actor was as honourable an one as that of the

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doctor, the painter, the writer, the musician, the grocer, the banker, or the brewer; and he demanded that his calling should receive as solid public recognition. He asked, in other words, that the leaders of his calling should receive knighthood and the like honours from the Crown in the same share as the leaders of these other callings, no more and no less.

His addresses at Edinburgh and at the Royal Institution, in which he appealed for the national recognition of the dignity of the drama, could mean and did mean little else—they meant this, or they were "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

That he did not ask a knighthood for himself for mere personal display, he abundantly proved by the simple fact that when, in 1883, the Coleridges prompted Gladstone to send in Irving's name to the Queen, on the Prime Minister replying that, before he did so,

### HIS CAREER

the Queen must be assured that Irving would accept the honour, Lord Coleridge's son, Stephen, had to report Irving's refusal. "His strength as a manager and power as an actor lay far more in the suffrages of the plain folk of the pit, than in the patronage, however lofty, of great people. He disclaimed any false pride in the matter; he did not affect to despise such an honour, and was very grateful."

But it is pretty certain, or he was stultifying himself by his Addresses, that if Wyndham and Bancroft had been offered their knighthoods at the same time, he would have accepted it. When Lord Rosebery sent in Irving's name to the Queen for knighthood twelve years later, Irving obeyed the command to go to Windsor, and was dubbed Sir Henry. But he took the earliest and most public occasion to state that he looked upon the honour as done not to himself but to his calling, and forthwith shed his

title from him in and about the personal business of his theatre.

It remains indeed a public scandal that men like Tree and Forbes Robertson and Bourchier, Frederick Harrison and Boucicault, Pinero and Shaw and Henry Arthur Jones, who could carry knighthood with distinction, should be passed over when, in the same position, they would have received such honours had they been painters, lawyers, grocers, brewers, or purveyors of potted meats.

In September of the following year, as Iachimo in *Cymbeline*, Irving added yet another master-portrait to his gallery of great villains.

His chief success in Madame Sans Gêne lay in his clever make-up as the short stout Napoleon, and in the utter disappearance of his peculiar tricks of standing and walking and voice and manner. It was the giant playing at cat's-cradle. On New Year's Day of 1878, he ap-

### HIS CAREER

peared in his son Laurence's Peter the Great. When set against the sorry stuff in Hichens and Traill's Medicine Man that followed it, one understands the father's high hopes for his younger son. The world will hear more of Laurence Irving and of his gifted brother.

The last year of the century saw Irving in Sardou's *Robespierre*, specially and badly written for him; but the enthusiasm with which it was received showed at least that he held his old sway over the hearts and homage of the playgoer.

Irving now, in fact, gave up the management of the Lyceum, the expenses of which baffled him; and again sailed for America. On his return, he produced *Coriolanus* at the Lyceum. In the July of 1902, before going back to America, being now sixty-four, having revived *Faust*, he gave, at the expiration of his tenancy of the Lyceum, a farewell performance of *The Merchant* 

of Venice, in which he appeared for the last time on the boards of his old theatre, with Ellen Terry as Portia—the last time also in which she played in company with her old comrade. The names of these two great players will go down to history together; indeed, to each other they owed a large share of the fame that came to them, and of the greatness that was in them.

The sands of his years were running out. Sardou's Dante at Drury Lane in the April of 1903 was a vast pantomime which brought credit neither to the author nor to Irving. His health was breaking down. His art survived his strength. On his return from America two years afterwards, he gave a series of his best parts at Drury Lane to crowded and enthusiastic audiences, who half realised the pathetic solemnity of the fact that their old idol would never play to them again. There was a strange and haunting sad-

### HIS CAREER

ness in the air of that crowded house that greeted him with passionate loyalty on the first night of his short farewell season; and his speech at the fall of the curtain was strangely pathetic, sounding as it did a note of sad foreboding. Within a few days, on the night of the 18th of June, he stood on that historic stage for the last time, having played, with wondrous power, significantly enough, the dying old veteran in Waterloo and the death of Becket. After call upon call from the vast audience that refused to leave the huge theatre, he stood before the footlights of London never to return, and, broken in health, and overcome with their greetings, a posy of dark red roses in his hand, he spoke his goodbye to them, with his old affectionate pride in being their "faithful, loving servant." He would have bade them farewell, but they shouted to him that they would not have it so, and he

bowed, and, wearily smiling, said that it should be "Good-night."

He took a little rest thereafter; but at Bradford, eleven days after starting upon his farewell visit through the country, on the night of Friday, the 13th of October, the end curtain of Becket ringing down to his last spoken words on the stage he loved and served so well: "Into thy hands, O Lord—into thy hands," he left the theatre a dying man. As he reached his hotel he suddenly called for a chair, and, staggering to a couch, fell upon it and died—and there died with him a great actor and a great man.

His body was burnt with solemn ceremony, and, at the nation's command, amidst the hush and mourning of the people, and with all the pomp and circumstance of a public burial, his ashes were laid in Westminster Abbey, hard by the dust of David Garrick.

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PORTRAIT OF IRVING BY OLIVER BATH



### HIS ART

"Every actor has his own methods, as every painter has his methods and every writer has his style."

—Irving.

Art is the emotional revelation of life. When Irving said "the moments of passion and pathos are the aim and end of dramatic art," he showed that he had builded his career with the line and plummet of its full significance. We can only know of Life either by living it, or, at second hand, through our fellows, by their making known to us the fuller and wider sensations of their multitudinous experiences. It is clear that if we are wholly cut off from our fellows, we must walk in a narrow parish, knowing little more of the splendour of life than do the deaf, the mute, and the blind. But we can know what they have lived through by knowing their thoughts and their sensations. And just as they can only communicate

their thoughts to us by speech, so they can only communicate their sensations to us by being able to make us feel what they have felt, which is by Art. They can only make us see and feel and hear what they have seen and felt and heard, emotionally, either through the poetic use of words that conjure up the emotions, as in oratory, prose, and verse—or through the art of sounds, which is music—or by the art of colour, which is painting—or the like—or through the union of these, as in the art of the drama.

Art, then, must create. It must communicate from the artist's senses to the same senses in us.

To be without art, therefore, is to be blind and deaf and mute to the splendour and the agony of the world.

Art is looked upon by prigs as a precious little enclosed garden that only the elect may enter—and of which the prig holds the keys. But we all practise art, and

are moved by the arts, in our degree, from the cradle to the grave. The child that essays to make us understand how it suffered wounds is practising art. Every child is a born actor. The moment we try to tell a tale with gesture and voice that are atune to that which we would communicate, we are acting; and in the doing we enlarge for another the garden of life.

Acting has been contemptuously described as "dressing up and painting the face and pretending to be someone else." Such as see no more in the art of the actor, would describe life as the putting on one's clothes in the morning in order to take them off at night. "What's the good of anything? Why, nothing!" sings Chevalier's loafer. So the base see nothing but baseness in everything. Man is but dust; and but to dust returneth.

As a fact, the actor is not acting because he paints his face and puts on the

apparel of another man; he is only acting when he makes us feel what it was like to be that man, whether noble or ignoble. And in the degree of his magnificence of artistry he adds to our magnitude. For, surely it is a splendid thing to be made to thrill with the dignity and the heroism that are in man—to be made to suffer shame for his shame—to be made to hate what is hateful—to be overcome with pity for what is pitiful, enthusiasm for what is admirable, contempt for what is contemptible! To know the remorse that another has suffered is to enlarge the heart—to add territory to the realm of life. Surely that is a handsomer life that is the richer for having known such sensations, than is the empty entity of him who crawls along a narrow path where the shrinking from life is the sole aim of his paltry egoism, and his barren lack of the noblest sensations of man his sole source of pride!

Of all the arts, that which has the most instant, direct, and overwhelming appeal to the human understanding is the drama—its scenery thrusts the picture upon the eye—its spoken lines, given with the full value of their sense, usurp the imagination through the hearing with all the force of oratory—its emotional statement is the most simple, the most natural, and the quickest to grasp, and the most easily understood.

The art of the drama is, in its vastness' and its grandeur, akin to the art of architecture; it involves in its creation the literary art of the playwright to create it, the art of the actor to state it, and the pictorial art of the theatre to clothe it.

Now, the art of the drama cannot exist without the three arts which it involves. Of a truth, each of the three arts may exist independently as literature, pantomime, or scenery; but

they cannot create the art of the drama without each other. The written play may be literature, but its art is unful-filled and still-born unless it be spoken—and upon the stage. And so with the others. In simple phrase, before the art of the drama can be, the playwright must create the words, the actor must utter them, and he must utter them upon a stage—and until these things are, there is no drama.

To judge Henry Irving's achievement in the drama, then, he must be considered in relation to the playwright, the acting, and the theatre of his day.

To estimate the genius of Henry Irving, he must be judged at the bar of fame on his claim to greatness, and on no other. And he claimed only to be an actor.

He was a great artist—the greatest of the theatre of his day.

With all his tricks and mannerisms,

that were so harped upon and carped about, if you shall set him beside his fellows, his artistry overtops their achievement with giant's stature.

Of one mistake we must be very wary in all the arts; and Irving never made it. All the arts are, to an extent, mimicry; the actor's no more than the others. But great art is interpretation, suggestion—not imitation.

In his quarrel with Coquelin he made his grasp upon this great truth abundantly clear. By such as do not understand the highest artistry, even before Coquelin came, it had been said of Irving to his disparagement, that in all his parts he was always Irving. Now, it is of the essence of the actor's art that he should portray the emotions. In that is his all or nothing. It is a part of his craft, the means whereby he creates those emotions, that, like the novelist, he should state them through character. He must make the characters live upon the stage,

and project them into our senses so that we know them, and are convinced by them, and add them to the number of our acquaintances. There are two ways in which the actor can thus compel a character into our knowledge-one by so playing his outer man and the habit in which he lived that his portrait remains with us as a master-picture of that outer man—the other by so playing the inner man that his inner reality and significance arouse in us the emotions which he splendidly felt or greatly suffered. Now, the mimetic acting that creates the outer man, however great it may be, cannot compare in power of artistry, in the emotional appeal, with that acting that produces the inner man, and raises him from the superficial individuality of his outer presence to the intense and real individuality of his whole human significance.

It may, to a certain extent, be true

that Irving had not the mimicry of a Garrick within which to conceal his own personal appearance; indeed he had not even the desire so to do. He thereby suffered little loss; perhaps greatly gained. He took enormous pains to make up his outer appearance in the type and likeness of the character he portrayed; but he accounted this of very secondary importance in He bent his powers upon the his art. creation of the emotions that played upon the inner man; not to clothing the form of the husk that held him. in the doing he showed gifts of immense power; and raised his art to the highest achievement.

He took the character and built it upon himself. He did not project himself into the skin of his characters.

His gifts in the statement of the violent emotions, terror, horror, remorse, cruelty, hate, and fear, and forthright courage, were prodigious; greed and 8 105

cunning, craft and subtlety, ambition and daring, and the strife for power all were within this man's range; the sombre moods of tragedy never knew a more compelling interpreter.

His grim sardonic humour gave an astounding value to his tragedy, an immense force to his comedy, arming his jests with a strangely telling point.

In the qualities that make for dignity in man, no actor ever surpassed him; and it is the highest proof of the great artistry that was in him, that he could keep the sense of kingship in Louis XI. and Richard III., whilst powerfully portraying their villainies, their dastardy, their unmitigated craft and cruelties. He diffused about the person of Charles the First that subtle aroma of kingly dignity that cost the nation a heavy blood-letting, that made of the proudest aristocracy of the world, the flower of England's nobility, his servile tools and his countenancers, and

cast a glamour over the most contemptible race of our kings.

The love-note and the blithe joy in the splendour of life were beyond his reach.

His command of pathos was deep and sure.

His gesture was superb; his pose of body at vital moments magnificent; his attitude always intensely attune to the words he spoke; his face and eyes and eyebrows wondrously eloquent.

He early learnt the deep lesson that it is not enough to play a part upon the stage, but that the actor's art is to convince the audience by thrusting himself upon them so that they live in the part whilst he portrays it. From the moment that Irving walked before the footlights, he reached out his will upon his audience and gripped them. Who, that has seen him play, has not felt the strange power that filled the theatre at his coming, or the consum-

mate skill with which he breathed his art into them? He held his audience as in a vice—compelled its attention—convinced it—never let go of it until he had done with it. His silences were as eloquent in their appeal to the senses as the speech of his mouth, or of his wondrous hands.

He created and set up on the English stage, with the most subtle power, a Hamlet that was so perfect that he lives in the memory a very prince, his every emotion, his every thought, taking possession of us, compelling us to enter into him and become, whilst he played the part, the doomed and brooding prince of Denmark.

It is said of Irving that he appealed to the intellect and not to the emotions. Never was more fatuous estimate. Irving was an artist—not a thinker. He was too perfect an artist to mistake the emotional appeal, which is art, for the intellectual appeal, which is not.

The wisdom of the intellect, logic, philosophy, can and must enter into great art; but they cannot so enter in until they be changed into terms of the senses, transmuted by the alchemy of art into terms of the emotions—changed into the picturesque statement.

And it is perhaps the grimmest stroke of irony that those who denied him the emotional appeal, dubbed him a "character actor," thereby allowing him that very genius in portraying the outer man which they denied him. For, all acting is character-acting; though the jargon of the theatre has come to use the phrase for the art that realises the eccentric tricks and outer surface of a man's individuality.

Indeed, it was a chief part of this man's glory that he rid the stage of that very vice of trying to jog the audience with spasms of rhetoric, which makes the intellectual appeal. He showed

the character as a consistent whole, body and soul.

He robbed blank verse of its terrors.

He spoke his lines as if he spoke his thoughts and sensations—not as if he had learnt them by heart. He spoke them into the sensitive film of our emotions; he did not declaim them into our mere thinking machinery.

He learnt his utterance of the written word in a splendid school of elocution; he spoke the broad resonant periods of the great declaimers; and he kept one foot in the past and the other in the theatre that his own genius created. The deep tragic note cannot be spoken in the voice of the drawing-room; he used the resounding methods of the past to get his lines across the footlights, rid of its mere rhetorical appeal to the intellect, and chastened by a natural statement of the emotional meaning of each phrase. He did not "tear a passion to tatters." This giving of the full values

to his lines with deliberate simplicity and the weighed word, this value of the telling pause, lifts the art of men like Irving and Wyndham to its fullest state-Actors like Abingdon hold the stage whilst they are upon it; and it is Irving's "children," as he called them, Tree and Forbes Robertson, Martin Harvey, Alexander, and their like, to whom we have to look for the acting of the poetic play that speaks with the deep-mouthed voice of tragedy. ving in tragedy and Wyndham in comedy are the fathers of all that is best on the modern stage. Irving held that "acting, like every other art, has a me-No painter, however great chanism. his imaginative power, can succeed in pure ignorance of the technicalities of his art; and no actor can make much progress till he has mastered a certain mechanism which is within the scope of patient intelligence. Beyond that is the sphere in which a magnetic per-

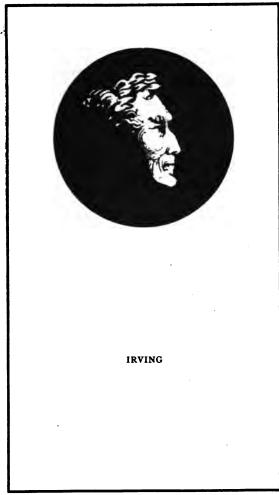
sonality exercises a power of sympathy which is irresistible and indefinable. That is great acting; but though it is inborn, and cannot be taught, it can be brought forth only when the actor is master of the methods of his craft." He spoke what he knew.

He aimed from the first at the highest. He knew that, to achieve the heights, he must overcome innate faults. It has been said rather neatly that his gait was like that of a "fretful man peevishly plodding across a ploughed field," that he "drawled in his talk and sprawled in his walk."

He knew his limitations full well; but he decided that they should not be limitations.

Behind the mask of that serious smile that illumined his handsome face, and was to fascinate the age, within the brain of that romantic figure was an iron and untiring will.

The youth came to the harsh business



GORDON CRAIG

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of his apprenticeship gifted with large faculties; he came also hampered with more than one defect and hindrance that must have destroyed a smaller man. He deliberately set himself to rid himself of the uncouth impediment that lies in a halting tongue, and to get control over the uncouth movement that lurks in restless limbs. He betook himself to the provinces; and the grim decision of character that took him into the wilderness and to hardship to learn the craftsmanship and business of his art when he might have started his career in London—and he had the temptation so to do—that same stern will he set to work with dogged resolution to make of his defective utterance a deep and wondrous instrument of speech, and of his restless movement and gesture so graceful and dramatic a thing that he came to express every thought and emotion that fell within the range of his art, so that at last one might understand

the words he spoke with such rare distinction and effect, even though his voice had been wholly unheard.

The stoop and hunching of the shoulders, which he employed in his lithe body's use with enhancing effect to increase his sardonic moods, he learnt to put from him in his heroic moments, when he stood up, or took the heroic pose, or uttered the majestic sentiment. He did more. His very defects, chastened and evolved, he made into aids to his splendid gesture, thereby increasing the power of his presentment of the emotions—making of his voice a grim ally to give out his quaint quips and fantasies.

So he came to sound the gamut of the tragic utterance with consummate genius as he moved with man's pathetic and grotesque helplessness to his fate, the puppet and the plaything of the Gods—from the grim sardonic moods of recklessness to the overwhelming despair of

such as suffer the inevitable catastrophe that is spun in the web of doom. . . .

Irving saw his art whole.

In the art of the theatre—the staging of the play—he did not reach such high achievement as in the art of acting; but he came near to it.

He early saw that the play should be an artistic whole—that plot, words, colour, scenery, music, grouping, all should go to make the general impression. He realised that a sombre scene assisted the illusion of a sombre mood—a bright scene the illusion of a blithe mood. And had he known how to gain this by simplicity, he might have achieved always to high artistry, as, indeed, he often did. For his scenery he would employ experts in the art of the period he wished to place on his stage. But his eagerness to fitly stagemanage a play often led him into the false realism of employing artists who

had no genius for the stage, as Alma Tadema, when he had far better have relied on himself and such masters of the art of the theatre as Harper, Hawes, Craven, and Telbin, and Hann.

He was a superb stage-manager; and, as such, a forerunner to prepare the way for Gordon Craig, whose masterly gifts promise to revolutionise the stage of the theatre.

Irving's elaborate care in making up for a part was without limit. He would procure prints that gave the dress and features of his characters, and pore over the outer semblance of the man.

How clean he kept the book of Shakespeare's genius you may see in the Irving edition of the great Elizabethan's works, marked by him for modern stage use.

He shrank from the honour of his knighthood lest it should disturb the brotherhood of the theatre. He was lord of a splendid republic.

There is a story told of Irving that he

heard that an old actress was in pitiful want. He called at her shabby doors, and was refused admittance. She was ill and in bed. He sent up his card, saying, "She will see Henry Irving," and was shown into the room.

"Come, come," said Irving—"this is not well—this is not well. Who is playing your part? Hein!"

The old actress burst into tears; she had not had a part for many a day—she was too old.

"Nonsense," said Irving—"I will give youapart—and a goodpart—the leading lady wants an understudy, but the wage is small. You shall have the scrip to-night; oh—ah—yes—the wage—well—you won't mind six guineas a week to begin with, eh? Hein!"

She was understudy until she died. . . . There is more than another tale that betrays the man's passionate devotion to his profession.

He met in the Strand one day two down-

at-heels old actors who had played with him in his early years, and were fallen destitute.

"Hein!" said Irving—"and where are you playing now, boys? Eh! What? Out of a job? Hein! you don't say so. Well, come round with me to the Lyceum."

They went, and Irving called his manager. But the manager had nothing to offer. No, even the carriers of banners were allotted.

"Hein!" said Irving—"you don't say so. I particularly want another banner. This gentleman shall carry it. Let me see, what used we to get when we were in Sunderland together?" He put his hand on the other's shoulder; "Thirty shillings? Hein! so we did. Well, make it two guineas."

The manager engaged the old actor; but, mindful of the limits of Irving's purse, tried to put his foot down about the other, declaring that no

single banner more could the stage hold.

"Hein!" said Irving—"that is awk-ward. Stay—this gentleman will need an understudy—this other gentleman will do for his understudy. Ah, yes—to be sure, there is treasury-night—yes—hein! well, I'm afraid we cannot offer his understudy more than thirty shillings. Hein! put down thirty shillings."...

Such a man wins loyal service.

It is often said of Irving that he won to success and fame as an actor through the gorgeous mounting of his plays. This is child's talk. But setting aside the high artistry of the man, that stood out even from amidst the dangers of being belittled by gorgeous scenery—indeed, his elaborate scenery was more often a danger than a source of increase to his art—it so happens that he won to fame at the Lyceum when the shabbiness of Bateman's scenery was almost

a scandal.

The art of acting he raised to its noblest achievement; the pictorial art of the theatre he raised out of the gutter and the lumber-room. But for the art of the playwright of his day he did next to nothing.

These first twain were his chiefest glory; the other his blackest fault.

He did not create for us a living drama. It was outside his powers—it was outside his aims.

He did revive the drama that slept aswoon, and near dead. That which he did for the drama was a renascence—a rebirth.

To the drama of the past he did a mighty service.

Shakespeare's method and form were alive and of his spacious Elizabethan day; they are for us to-day the form and style as of a dead language. No one so speaks.

Sheridan and Goldsmith did not write in the Tudor form and style; they rejected blank verse, and wrote in a style that was alive and of their day—they breathe the eighteenth century. They are nearer to us; they nevertheless belong to the past—if nearer past.

Irving's theatre gathered about it no group of original writers, as did the Elizabethan theatre—as must any

theatre that is fully alive.

Irving did not even seek the play of his own time. The few men that he employed, wrote a lifeless drama, in the dead form of blank verse, in a dead atmosphere, in dead phrasing. Tennyson and Wills yielded still-born drama—just as the Middle Ages wrote dog-Latin, just as Pater wrote English prose. Irving turned a deaf ear to the serious drama that was being born in his day, that was influencing the world's life and thought.

The good acting play, it is true, is not

of needs a good literary play. But if the drama of an age is to live, the play must be written in the spirit of the age.

The fact is that Irving was not concerned with the written drama; he was only concerned with acting; and the actor's art concerns itself with acting. He set the value of a play on its power to enable the actor to express emotion before its value in literary phrasing. And in the doing he was right—as an actor.

High scholarship, such as it is, was not for him; indeed he laid no claim to it. His large artistry was the richer thereby. He had the good fortune to achieve an art unshackled by the castiron fetters, unweakened by the servile stoop, undiluted by the senile blood of the academies.

His idol, Shakespeare, suffered the like advantage, and thus came to set mere learning under his heel.

Whether he had a love of literature Irving showed little sign, except that, by his addresses, he could create it. He approached letters only in the degree that they could give him that which he might use to his art's aggrandisement. For he put his actor's art above literature, and made his acting almost independent of it.

No honest man of profound scholarship could have put Wills's Charles the First upon the stage—the play is a snob's lie, and a vulgar one, that was not fit to gull even the ignorant who bawl the strident fool's chorus in a music-No man who has the taste for hall. good literature could have played the illiterate lines of his Macaire when so fine a literary masterpiece as the one that Stevenson and Henley wrote was on the nation's bookshelf. A man of scholarship and a lover of literature must have known that two of the greatest geniuses in literature

written Faust. Irving took the plays that gave the actor the finest range for his artistry, and he let literature and scholarship go to the winds if these things stood in his way, or baulked his powers. He was an actor above all—and for the acting he sacrificed everything without scruple. And it must be confessed that his Charles the First and his Macaire justified him by raising him to fine achievement in the player's art, which, after all, was his chief significance.

He had a vivid and fervent imagination to entice into the highways and make visible the spell of the romance that was in him, so that it transmuted into gold all that he touched—and he touched some of the basest metal of England's literature.

What he did know, as no man of his day knew it, was the stage, and what he could do and could not do on that stage. The rest of his knowledge was

the veriest dilettanteism — and he played the dilettante's part, as he played most parts, in consummate fashion. Behind the enigma of his wondrous smile lurked a grave disregard for all that was superfluous to the art of acting; and he hid himself whimsically and grimly behind it as behind his deafness hid Sir Joshua, who, "when they talked of their Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff, shifted his trumpet and simply took snuff."

What Irving said of Shakespeare he might with equal justice have said of himself, that "he dared to rob Tragedy of her stilts, and successfully introduced an element of comedy which was not dragged in by the neck and heels." "The stage," he said, "will depend for its constant hold on the affection and attention of mankind upon its loftier work; upon its more penetrating passion; upon its themes which

most deeply search out the strong affections and high hopes of men and women; upon its fit and kindling illustration of great and vivid lives." Thus he set up his own commandment over the altar of his faith—and kept it.

He raised the stage, and dignified the actor's calling. He was a great artist—a fascinating figure—a courteous and a large-souled gentleman.

Nor did he make any mistake as to who must be his judge.

He was bitterly assailed in print both by the crude and the dandified who took their own shallow tastes to be the test of immortality; but he never stooped to answer their jibes or their mockeries. Good criticism and sound fault-finding he read with profit; but from that November night on which he stood triumphant before a London audience with the sound of their wild enthusiasm in his ears; from that night when of a sudden he knew that he had stepped

into his kingdom, that he was in the foremost rank and that his audience knew it; from that first night of *The Bells* his shrewd sense revealed to him, as at the lightning's flash upon the darkness, that it was not what the critics said of him, but what the audience said of him, on which an actor's reputation must be founded—and he was glad of it; glad that his repute lay with that audience whom he loved, and of whom he always claimed to be the "faithful loving servant."

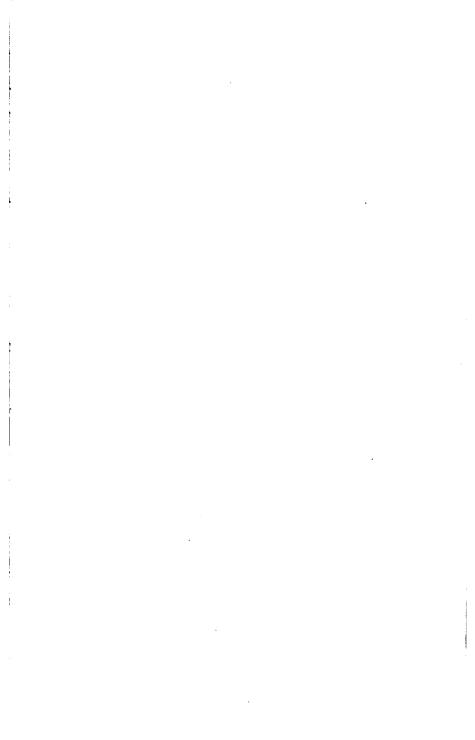
Next to his art and his calling the playgoer held his heart. The high prices paid by his American audiences to see him, under the vile traffic in theatre-tickets, were a sore distress to him. His heart was in the pit and with the gods—with them that loved his art.

And because, forsooth, it finds its way into print, shall we set the opinion of this little scribbling un-named fellow,

or that, against the voice of the vast audiences that gave him full-mouthed praise, against the judgment of the great who lived in his day and made witness to his magnificence? Shall we deny him the right of sepulchre with the illustrious dead to whom the nation grants splendid burial; and that, too, because some little pen is not ashamed to write the insignificance of its demur?

All that was mortal of him rests in Poet's Corner now; the ears that were ever quick to take the cue that called him to the footlights were dulled only by death. The nation did well to honour itself by giving honour to the romantic figure of the gentle grim genius whose ashes repose far from the footlights' flare that he loved so well, unheeding of the theatre's applause, deaf to the call-boy's shout, in the high dramatic company of the mighty ones that sleep in Westminster Abbey.





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